

REMARKS

This is a timely reply to the Final Office Action of December 11, 2003. In that Final Office Action, the Examiner allows Claims 31 – 43. The Examiner also indicates that Claims 4, 7 - 22 and 24 - 30 are allowable, but objects to these claims since they depend upon rejected base claims. Finally, the Examiner rejects Claims 1 – 3, 5, 6, 23 and 44. The rejection of these claims is traversed by the amendments discussed below.

Claim Amendments

Claim 1 has been amended to include the features previously recited in rejected Claim 2 and allowable Claim 4. Claims 2 and 4 have been canceled. Claim 3 has been made dependent on Claim 1, as amended.

Claim 7 has been amended to be made independent and to include the features previously recited in Claim 1, as originally filed.

Claim 15 has been amended to be made independent and to include the features previously recited in Claim 1, as originally filed.

Claim 23 has been canceled. Claim 24 has been amended to be made independent and to include the features previously recited in Claim 23, as originally filed. Claim 28 has been amended to be made independent and to include the features previously recited in Claim 23, as originally filed.

The Applicant submits that these amendments are all supported by the claims as originally filed and do not add new matter to the application. Therefore, the Applicant submits that the amendments may be properly entered. Further, the Applicant retains the right to file the canceled claims and/or the claims as originally filed in subsequent prosecution of the present application and/or in any divisional, continuation, or continuation-in-part applications based on the present application.

The application, as amended, comprises 7 independent claims and 41 total claims. Enclosed herewith are a paper calculating the excess claims fees due and a check therefor.

Claim Rejection - 35 U.S.C. § 102

In section 2, the Examiner rejects Claims 1-3 and 23 under 35 U.S.C. 102. However, in sections 6 and 7, the Examiner states that Claims 4, 7-22 and 24 - 30 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

As discussed above, Claim 1 has been rewritten to include all of the features of rejected Claim 2 and allowable Claim 4. Therefore, the Applicant submits that Claim 1, as amended, is now allowable. Claim 3 has been amended to be made dependent on Claim 1, as amended.

Therefore, the Applicant submits that Claim 3, as amended, is allowable.

Claim 7 has been amended to be made independent and to include all of the features of Claim 1, as originally filed. Therefore, the Applicant submits that Claim 7, as amended, and Claims 8-14, dependent on Claim 7, are allowable.

Claim 15 has been amended to be made independent and to include all of the features of Claim 1, as originally filed. Therefore, the Applicant submits that Claim 15, as amended, and Claims 16-22, dependent on Claim 15, are allowable.

Claim 23 has been canceled, but both Claims 24 and 28 have been amended to be made independent and to include all of the features previously recited in Claim 23, as originally filed. Therefore, the Applicant submits that Claim 24, as amended, and Claims 25 - 27, dependent on Claim 24, are allowable. The Applicant also submits that Claim 28, as amended, and Claims 29 - 30, dependent on Claim 28, are allowable.

Claim Rejection - 35 U.S.C. § 103 based on Keene

In Section 7 of the Office Action, the Examiner rejects Claims 5, 6 and 44 under 35 U.S.C. 103. As discussed above, Claim 1 has been amended to include the features of Claim 4, now canceled. Therefore, the Applicant submits that Claims 5, 6 and 44, dependent either directly or indirectly on Claim 1, as amended, are allowable.

Conclusion

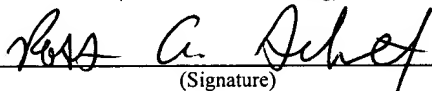
For the reasons set forth above, the Applicant submits that all pending claims of the application are allowable. In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of all claims of the application are respectfully solicited.

The Commissioner is authorized to charge any additional fees which may be required or credit overpayment to deposit account no. 12-0415. In particular, if this response is not timely filed, the Commissioner is authorized to treat this response as including a petition to extend the time period pursuant to 37 CFR 1.136(a) requesting an extension of time of the number of months necessary to make this response timely filed and the petition fee due in connection therewith may be charged to deposit account no. 12-0415.

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Post Service with sufficient postage as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Mail Stop AF, Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450 on

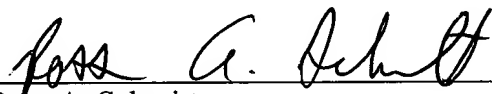
February 4, 2004
(Date of Mailing)

Ross A. Schmitt
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(Signature)

2-4-2004
(Date)

Respectfully submitted,


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